

Effects of Different Negative Feedbacks on Language Output Capacity of Chinese EFL Learners

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Abstract

Second language acquisition is the process involved in the interactivity between the learners and other target-language users. In this process, such factors as the language proficiency and ways of feedback will all have different influence on the output of the interactivity. This paper studies the effects of negative feedbacks (implicit feedback, error correcting and explicit feedback, error pointing out) of speakers at different proficiency levels (teachers and peers) on the output ability of language learners, and discussion on effectively using feedback ends the paper.

Keywords

Feedback; Language Output Ability; Language Learning

Introduction

According to Long's interaction hypothesis (1996), second language acquisition is the result of the interaction between the learners and other speakers, especially the ones with higher language level. In this interactive activities, educators give feedback to learners on their errors, making them aware of difference between the native language and the target language and guiding their attention to target language forms. In this interactive process, learners can correct their errors after the feedback (Gass2003; Long 1996). Regarding output, Swain proposed output hypothesis early in the middle 1990s, arguing that the noticing function of output can make the second language learners notice what they want to express but don't know how to express, the problem of their inter-language, when using the target language both in speaking or written forms. Output, especially written output, is the highest standard of language learning, and also the most difficult stage for language learners. But the cultivation of written output capacity has been considered blank: Considerable non-English major students feel difficult in writing abstracts of

their article in English after graduation. How to cultivate the ability of expressing themselves in English, especially how to choose the suitable feedback, is always a big challenge plaguing China's foreign language teaching. Based on the framework of interaction theory, the essay is aimed to explore what impacts different feedbacks will have on Chinese EFL (English as Foreign Language) College Students' English writing competence with the help of an analysis of experiments.

Literature Review

As Swain (1995) pointed out, language output can promote second language learners' awareness of inter-language problems, and the corresponding target language input and correction, which is a necessary condition for language acquisition. According to Long's interaction hypothesis (1996), second language acquisition is the result of the interaction between the learners and other speakers, especially the ones with higher language level. In these interactive activities, educators give feedback to learners on their errors, making them aware of difference between the native language and the target language, and guiding their attention to target language forms, so that learners can correct their errors after the feedback and improve the consciousness of the language. Vygotsky said, "The zone of proximal development exists in many aspects of learners"(ZDP) (1978), namely "the gap between the actual level and level of potential development ", and what's more, the gap between students' existing level and the level of potential development which the teaching process should stimulate students to fill. This process requires teachers to give students feedback, help students bridge the zone of proximal development effectively to improve the students' language acquisition. Swain's output hypothesis,

Long's "the interaction hypothesis", and Vygotsky's social and cultural development theory laid the theoretical foundation for the study of two language acquisition. According to the above theory, many different feedback studies have been carried out with the focus on the feedback approach, that is, how to get the best results through feedback.

From the perspective of second language teaching, feedback is the teacher's response to EFL learners' use of the language. According to its function and property, Vigil & Oller (1976) divided feedback into two categories: one is positive feedback, neutral and negative feedback and the other is cognitive feedback and affective feedback. In recent years, many researchers have tried to study the effects of negative feedback on learners' language acquisition, but the conclusions are not the same.

Study on negative feedbacks is much more than that on positive ones. Negative feedback focuses on error correction. Linguists think that behavior of analysis of language errors should be defined as the error analysis (EA). Error analysis originates from comparative analysis which in the nineteen seventies have been paid more attention to by the scholars and then set off the climax of error analysis (Ellis 1994:69).

Some researchers thought that negative feedback can promote language acquisition (Lyster 1998; Oliver 2000). Carroll & Swain (1993) found that adult learners can use the teacher's negative feedback to learn the abstract rules of the language. Vigil & Oller (1976) discovered that the negative feedback helps prevent fossilization, promote the development of learners' cognitive. Nabei & Swain (2002:44) also believed that in the natural environment when the positive input was not enough to make the accurate use of the target language, negative feedback to learners will be particularly important. In a word, language error feedback plays a certain role in improving learners' error correction capability (Chandler 2003; Fathman & Whalley 1990) and increasing the accuracy of language use (Bitchener & Knoch 2008; Ellis et al. 2008), What's more, the error correction does not affect the fluency in writing (Chandler 2003).

However, grammar nativist (Cook 2000, Schwartz 1999), held that negative evidence (negative feedback) has little influence on the language. language syntax progress is the result of positive evidence (positive feedback) and the negative feedback does not benefit the development of the language. Some researchers (McDonough 2005; Van den Branden 1997) found that

learners are not able to recognize the information in some implicit negative feedback. Sim (1989) pointed out that if negative cognitive feedback generate affective disorders in learners, fossilization of interlanguage can also be caused. People in the favor of the communicative approach do not advocate the use of negative feedback. They think that errors are inevitable phenomenon in the process of learning, and learner's errors should be treated "tolerantly". (Wilkins 1979; Brumfit 1984). Kepner (1991) drew a comparison between the college students' compositions with the language error modification and compositions with only the general comments on content. The result is that the mistakes made in the former is not less than that in the latter. Sheppard (1992) had similar findings. He pointed out that students who have the negative feedback only have the remarkable difference in the correct use of punctuation among many abilities. Truscot (1999) goes too far to hold that "error correction is harmful and should be banned".

Looking at the current study on the negative feedback, there is not a unified understanding in types of feedback and its effect. Some research conclusions are even contradict to each other. One reason is that the existing researches are not the same in almost all aspects: research object characteristic parameters (such as: Whether the foreign language learners are in the target language or native language environment. The language they studied is a second language or foreign language etc.), sample size, the length of time, measuring tools, type of experiment, experiment content, experiment method and etc. The second reason is that no experiment is replicated on the basis of the former study so that there is a lack of comparability. Negative feedback focuses on error correction (error treatment). However, in the terms of the ways of error correction, which is conducted, correcting the mistakes or marking wrongs? In the terms of subject, teachers or students, who make error correction? In view of the above problems, we are going to answer the following questions through the specified language test.

What effects that different negative feedback will have on students' writing competence ?

The Research Process

Subjects

We selected 4 classes (60 students for one class) from the department of International Trade. 30 students were chosen from one class, including 15 girls and 15

boys. Writing tests of different feedback will be conducted in these classes during 10 weeks.

The Research Process and Control of Disturbance Variables

Firstly, we designed different negative feedbacks: teacher feedback and student feedback. In teacher feedback, there are two ways: teachers pointing out the mistake (teacher error pointing-out TEP) and teachers correcting the error (teacher error correction TEC). In student feedback, there are two kinds of negative ways: students pointing out the mistake (peer error pointing-out PEP) and students correcting errors (peer error correction PEC) two kinds of negative feedback.

The specific content of the experiment is a new topic writing every week, for 10 weeks, a total of 10 compositions. After the teacher's commentary on the compositions in class, students are required to write a composition revision in the following week..

To control as far as possible the disturbance variables of different type of feedback in different classes, first of all, during the 10 weeks, the content for writing teaching is the same. After the correction, all teachers involved have a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages in compositions and then put the results in the form of written materials. Secondly, in order to ensure consistency in teacher assessment, before carrying out the experiment, 10 articles of different levels among students were randomly selected and the teachers involved were asked to make assessment by using the percentage grading system. By SPSS statistics, the internal consistency of teachers was 0.9.

In order to facilitate statistical analysis and make contrast, we record the scores of the first and last composition as the main data for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

After a period of 10 weeks of the experiment, the relevant data was as follows:

1) The Overall Analysis

TABLE 1 DATA OF THE PRO AND POST EXPERIMENT

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 NPPE	75.4667	120	10.13185
NPOST	77.2750	120	11.60988

It is seen from table 1 that students scored higher in second composition but the paired samples t test shows the increase is of no significance.

2) Teacher's Negative Feedback

For the teacher negative feedback, there are two forms of TEC and TEP.

TABLE 2 STUDENTS' OVERALL SCORE AFTER TEC FEEDBACK

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 NPTE	76.7333	30	7.81216
NPOST	83.6000	30	5.73315

Table 2 shows the mean of the scores of the students under the TEC feedback increases, (from 76.733 to 83.600), and the author found the paired samples t test shows the increase is significant ($t=5.291$, $df=29$, the $p=0.000<0.05$).

TABLE 3 BOYS AND GIRLS' SCORES UNDER TEC FEEDBACK

	1male2female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NPTE	1.00	15	72.7333	7.32380
	2.00	15	80.7333	6.20445
NPOST	1.00	15	80.5333	6.44611
	2.00	15	86.6667	2.52605

Table 3 shows that the average score of boys has improved from 72.733 to 80.533 and that of girls has increased from 80.733 to 86.667. By the paired samples t test, it was found that both improvements of boys ($t=-3.922$, $df=14$, $p=0.002<0.05$) and girls ($t=-3.484$, $df=14$, $p=0.004<0.05$) are significant.

TABLE 4 STUDENTS' SCORES UNDER TEP FEEDBACK

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 NPTE	76.4667	30	9.36882
NPOST	77.3667	30	10.54541

Table 4 shows that the average scores of students by the TEP feedback has increased (from 76.467 to 77.367), but by the paired samples t test, it was found that there is no significant improvement ($t=0.416$, $df=29$, $p=0.681>0.05$).

TABLE 5 THE SCORES OF BOYS AND GIRLS UNDER TEP FEEDBACK

	1male2female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NPTE	1.00	15	73.6667	8.85330
	2.00	15	79.2667	9.30796
NPOST	1.00	15	73.0667	11.60952
	2.00	15	81.6667	7.48013

Table 5 shows that the average score of boys has decreased from 73.667 to 73.067, but by the paired samples t test, it was found that this decline was not significant ($t=0.176$, $df=14$, $p=0.863>0.05$). Girls' score has improved from 79.267 to 81.667, but the paired samples t test shows that this increase is insignificant ($t=-0.875$, $df=14$, $p=0.396>0.05$).

3) Peer Feedback

In the peer feedback, there are two forms: PEC and PEP

Table 6 shows that the average score of students has declined, but the paired sample t test results

show this decline is insignificant ($t=0.400$, $df=29$, $p=0.692>0.05$).

TABLE 6 STUDENTS' SCORES UNDER PEC FEEDBACK

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 NPRE	75.2000	30	12.39410
NPOST	74.3000	30	11.30502

TABLE 7 THE SCORES OF BOYS AND GIRLS UNDER PEC FEEDBACK

1m2f	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NPRE 1.00	15	69.0667	12.57814
2.00	15	81.3333	8.90960
NPOST 1.00	15	69.6000	9.94126
2.00	15	79.0000	10.88905

Table 7 shows that the average score of boys increased slightly (from 69.067 to 69.600) under the PEP, but further test suggests that the increase is not significant ($t=-0.172$, $df=14$, $p=0.866>0.05$); the average score of girls declined slightly (from 1.333 to 79), further test also shows that this decline is not significant ($t=0.700$, $df=14$, $p=0.495>0.05$).

TABLE 8 STUDENTS' SCORES UNDER PEP FEEDBACK

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 NPRE	73.4667	30	10.57888
NPOST	73.8333	30	14.77902

It shows that the score of the students has increased slightly (from 73.4677 to 73.933) under the PEP, but without significant improvement ($t=-0.161$, $df=29$, $p=0.873>0.05$).

TABLE 9 STUDENTS' SCORES UNDER PEP FEEDBACK

1m2f	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NPRE 1.00	15	70.0000	12.24745
2.00	15	76.9333	7.48777
NPOST 1.00	15	74.6667	17.26543
2.00	15	73.0000	12.36354

Table 9 shows the average score of boys increased (from 70.000 to 74.667) under the PEP, but without significant improvement ($t=-1.542$, $df=14$, $p=0.154>0.05$); and the average score of girls has declined (from 76.933 to 73.000), but without significant improvement. ($t=1.262$, $df=14$, $p=0.227>0.05$).

Based on the above analysis, obviously, in general, there is no significant increase in student achievement after these negative feedbacks.

Specifically, one feature is that the negative feedback of teachers, especially the TEC has a significant positive effect on boy and girl students. However, TEP somehow helps improve girl students' achievement but without significance while boy students' scores have been on the decline. Another feature shows that peer negative feedback has no significant effect on students' performance, especially to girl students. Both

PEP and PEC have caused decline in students' scores.

Thus in the teaching practice, negative feedback, especially TEC should be used more in class. And for the peer feedback, it can sometimes be used for boys, but not for girls.

Conclusions

The cultivation of language output ability is the ultimate goal of language learning and is also an important part of language teaching. Proper feedback can make learners notice the gap between their inter-language and the target language so as to improve the ability of language output. Different gender prefers different feedback. The experimental research shows that the teacher feedback will have a positive effect on all students while peer feedback doesn't, although peer feedback has a positive influence only on boys.

In the past, all of the feedback study mostly focused on the necessity and way of feedback which is theoretical but not practical acquisition process. This study begins with the changes in the acquisition process, explores the suitable feedback to students of different gender and provides constructive suggestions to form-focused teaching. In this sense, this study can help to promote the further development of this study at home and abroad. Just because of the quantity and regional restrictions, the results should be further verified in more Chinese English learners before its wide promotion.

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